

# FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SOUTH<sup>1</sup>

By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

(From *The Pictorial Review*)

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The town stirred. Under my gallery there came and went a word-fight between Berber muleteers from the north. After that I heard the evening call of the muezzin dropping down from the mosque-tower on the crowded hill, arid, sinuous, like the note of another wooden well-wheel shrilling above the desert floor. Then somewhere under a house arose the hollow voice of a tambour struck with a thumb, and a man sang. In a rift of silence a wandering breeze threshed all the date-fronds in the *oued*-bottom with a phantom of distant applause. Nearer at hand a foot-scuffle in the dusk. A choked laugh. And all around in the heavy shadows of that quarter the subdued giggling, the rustling, and jewel-clanking of the women of dark delight.

"What's wrong with the Ouled Naïl girls to-night?" I asked along the gallery. Abd, son of Abdallah the Moza-bite, rose to his feet on the tiles near the stair, a white wraith.

"*Kain kairouan ja, sidi.*" (There is a caravan come.)

Drums banged; women scurried. The momentous night was established and stars sprinkled the sky, large and restless stars, always flickering a little to the eye in that air without body.

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hitherto as if congealed by the terror of the strange world before her, now thawed and filled her with a gnawing sadness and self-pity. How is it at home now? her thoughts ran. How is it at home? It rains. There is the muddy road, the ruts and the pools. Father is indoors now, back from the field. The gray dusk falls. Mother sits with folded arms by the window and gazes longingly out into the dark.

"Are you looking for me?" the figure in the window, forgetting herself, suddenly wailed. "Mother, mother dear, take me to you. I ain't used to this; I'm so lonely and afraid."

Her lips trembled visibly. A spasm shot across her face and contracted it—and many of the crowd outside who made "mouths" at her, burst into a triumphant hurrah. "She laughed!" roared a colored man so loud that it reached the manager, who forthwith decided to discharge the "figure." "I get the prize," yelled others. "I made her laugh! I made her laugh!"

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I sat at an island crossroads of the western Sahara, where the pale, blurred sand-courses, like the wakes of ships, come up the bald skin of the globe from the green mysteries that lie months away on the other side of the south.

"Abd!" I called, "where does the caravan come from, east or west?"

Abd was gone. On the tiles I heard the fall of a Christian boot. Borak, the Englishman, came toward me in the shadows.

"I wonder you're not out," he said. "The caravan comes from the south."

"Not——!"

"Rather! This is a real one—like the old days again. Right away up from under. You'd better have a look at the beggars; you're romantic, you know. Might not have another chance in a year."

I put on my coat and went with him. Borak has been too long in Africa, one part and another. He has forgotten that it is the Dark Continent. As we walked he went on in his habitual vein of banter.

"It's a tidy lot of heroes for you. You may imagine. Seven 'moonlights' on the trek, and I lay a pound sterling not a man in the crowd has washed in the thirty weeks."

"Thirty weeks!" I couldn't help echoing it. "Lord!"

"There ought to be a story there, eh? As a matter of fact there isn't. I insist again that there's more story, more poetry and romance in the life of a Whitechapel coster than you'll hear in a year listening to these people. They lack imagination. They want the mental whip of civilization; that's it in a nutshell."

I felt like saying "Bosh!" Borak is too dogmatic.

We were passing into the thick of the "low town," and on our right loomed the ugly oblong of the douane, the French custom-house that stands at the converging of the deep-Sahara routes. Borak looked at it and chuckled.

"Old Arnauld" (the customs official) "is in a fair pother. There's a frightful mixture in the trek, blacks and browns from a dozen different basins down below, and you may imagine there's a lack of passports. So tha s Arnauld's



job; to divine. Or rather it's Bou Dik's job, for the orderly has all the work. When I passed the market coming to you Bou Dik was tackling an old chap who claims to be Senegal but looks away east of that, a pot-bellied old swine, black as a chimney-pot, solemn as an archbishop, and blind as a bat. I gather all he wants is to be let pass quietly on his way to Holy Mekka, where he hopes to die. Bou Dik, though, is full of wild and horrid notions. He has crossed the trail lately of a dervish man who has the word that Mouley Saa\* is now booked to descend in the guise of a blackamoor, and naturally, having a fat berth with the Infidel, Bou Dik isn't going to let the Deliverer into *his* department—not if he can help it. So just now Bou Dik is death and leprosy on niggers. I wish you could have heard the row."

I was to hear it presently. We had arrived at a chain swung across the black street and, ducking under it, we came into the open market square. I had seen the place a hundred times, by sun and moon and stars, and still familiarity had not quite worn off my first sense of it as a haven between the winds, the anchorage of a remote white port of call lost in the ocean of stone. To-night that illusion was deepened a dozenfold. There is no other metaphor in speech so true as "ships of the desert." They were here. To-night I knew that I had known before only the small fry of that dry sea world, only the shore-huggers, the humble brotherhood of the coastwise trade. Here to-night was the creature of the main, the deep-sea squadron, the tall fleet.

From where we stood, clear to the further shore of dim arcades, the ground was hidden under the mass of kneeling beasts and heaped bales, a tumbled thing, monstrous in sleep. We picked our way through the ruck, lighting matches from time to time when we found ourselves trapped in blind alleys between bales and humps, or felt our way barred by the hairy neck of a camel curving waist-high across the night. Mountains whisked fat tails at us; sleeping legs sprawled from beneath hills of cargo like dead men pinned under wreckage. Borak took hold of my elbow.

\*The Napoleonic Messiah of Mohammedan prophecy.

"This way," he said. "I hear the voice of Bou Dik."

I heard it too, impassive, obstinate. There was a small fire of brush-roots throwing a glow around a ring of specters in the center of the field of ruin. The burnouses, all the same color of desert dust, might indeed have been winding-sheets; the hooded faces, gaunt, bone-built, played upon by the weak and tricky illumination from beneath, might have been skulls. And in the midst of the communing dead Bou Dik, enveloped in his red robe of authority, was the devil himself presiding.

His voice had ceased. As we settled behind him a man got to his feet on the side beyond the fire. With a gesture which had in it something of the trained orator he put back the hood of his burnoose, baring his strong neck and his round, blue-black, kinky-polled negroid head.

"Thou hast demanded, sidi, who is this man who is the father of my father. Thou hast demanded whence he comes, whither he goes, what he desires. Now I will tell thee all these things, I, Belkano, who am not without power in the country which is under Kalgou."

He spoke a quaint Arabic in which all the throat-sounds were brought forward and softened—such a tongue, Borak told me, as black boys pick up in the Mohammedan *zaouias* at Sikasso and Timbuktu—quaint, and yet more easily understood in the Mزاب than dialects not so far away, in Tunis, say, or the Moroccan uplands.

"The father of my father," he said, "is a very great and holy man."

In the pause that followed all the eyes turned upon the object deposited at the speaker's feet. It was discerned to be human.

"Black as a chimney-pot, solemn as an archbishop, blind as a bat." Like many of Borak's observations, that one had everything in it but the essential. The essential thing was the man's enormous separation. Whether it was the infirmity of his great age or whether it was his "holiness" (which may account for many things), he was removed to a distance which could not be measured. He lived on another planet. He lived within another sky, the sky of his own skin.

There was something majestic in the completeness of his immobility. Save for a faint, slow, rhythmical pulse of his swollen lower lip there was nothing visibly alive in him. Not once did the dead eyeballs, sustained in little cups of rheum, shift from the line of dead ahead. From the first to the last of that audience he remained in the attitude in which I imagine he must have been deposited, a sphinx thing in ebony, content with memories. Memories gorgeous or infernal. His lip fascinated me. I could not get my eyes away from that pendulous and extraordinary tissue, throbbing with faint, ordered convulsions in the orange light. It was as if the creature's heart, appalled by something under the black sky of skin, had broken prison and escaped so far, only to be caught on the threshold and hang there eternally, beating.

I had to shake myself. In a whisper, to Borak: "What's that he was saying? The tall one."

"He says that his grandfather is bound on the pilgrimage to Mekka because he is tremendously holy, and he is tremendously holy because he has a huge sin on his soul. Not bad, eh? It has happened before."

Bou Dik's voice was heard. "What then is that sin?"

The dark orator looked around the circle beneath him.

"It is known in Andiorou and Adar. It is known in Damagarin country and even in Manga country in the east." He looked at Bou Dik. "Now I will recount thee that history, sidi."

His gaze returned to the fire. I shall not soon forget him as he stood there against the stars of the desert night, tall, glossy, vibrant, speaking out in a strong voice the story of the moribund flesh beside him.

"Know thou then that it was in the years before the missionaries of God (to whom be the prayer) and of his Prophet (be his bliss eternal by the streams that never cease!) had brought to my tribe the Word and the Flame of Islam. Glory to the One God!"

"Glory to the One God!" the echo rustled around the ring.

"In those days then the men of my people lived in darkness. They performed no ablutions. Their prayers were



to images made with their hands. The strongest and bravest of the young men of that tribe was Djeba, who was later called Djim, as I will recount to thee, sidi, and who was to become the father of my father, and who is this man. The young man who was next to Djeba in strength and courage was Moa. These two were brothers of the milk. Of these two, each was the other's breath. When these two went into the bush to hunt, the animals said to one another, 'Strike if thou wilt amongst seven men, but avoid the Brothers of the Milk!' So lived Djeba and Moa in those days. Djeba was the spear of Moa; Moa was Djeba's shield.

"In those days then came a war-party from the south, from the country of Gando under Sokoto, the country of braggarts and thieves. They came out of the bush in the morning and moved toward the village, casting their spears aloft and beating on drums. The warriors of my people did not fail to answer them. They advanced out of the stockade. Nikato, the Headman, was in the forefront, and at his two shoulders went Djeba and Moa. That sunrise Djeba slew five of the sons of Gandoland. Moa slew five. Neither cut nor bruise was on their bodies. *Sing the Valor of the Brothers of the Milk!*"

The apostrophe rang out, absorbed, deep-throated, across the sleeping caravan. My eyes went to the flesh on the ground. Into that dark house had those words been able to penetrate? Had their ringing set some hidden echo ringing? How could one say? The lip that was like the man's drawn heart pulsed in the same laggard, imperturbable count; the dead eyeballs did not shift. But perhaps they were dead only that they might see the better the sunlight of that vanished and heroic myth.

*"Sing the Valor and the Victory of the Brothers of the Milk!*

"That war-party was beaten; its dead soiled the ground; its living fled into the bush. That day the drums were beaten in the village and mutttons were killed; that night a feast was made. The young men danced and the old men made sacrifice to their images.

"But the images of those days were idolatrous and had



no power over good and ill. *La illah il allah!*\* Accordingly then it was written that the survivors of that war-party, gathering again in the bush and being drunk with the desire of revenge, fell once more upon the village in the hour when the young men were full-fed and their weapons away. So in that night many of my tribe were slain. The stockades were thrown down; the houses were given to the flame. In the light of that flame many virgins were desecrated, many old men disemboweled, many children spun on spears. But those of good growth and being were taken away. Djeba and Moa were taken away.

"How can I recount to thee, sidi, the days of that march? Am I then another Errendi, that the words of my lamentation should fall like burning oil on a new wound? But the history is well known in all the country above the River, for my father's brother, Ahmed ben Djeba, he who had it out of the mouth of Djeba, has made it a chant at a hundred feasts and sung it under a hundred council-trees. He has sung the days of that going, the weeks, each week after the other through the hotness of that bush-trail. He has told the tale of the moons. In the roof of his mouth he has recalled the song of the lash that fell on those men's shoulders and made of their flesh the flesh of goats that is hung on the stockade to cure. He has stirred the dung-heaps to bring in memory the meat that was given them at evening before they fell down to sleep. With his tongue he has made the clank of the chain that bound them together, the heavy chain of iron that bound together even those two who were bound by the strong bond of the breast that gave them suck!

"Many among them died. When they died their bodies were cut from the chain with swords. Djeba and Moa grew thin. When Djeba looked at Moa he saw a skeleton that he did not know. When Moa looked at Djeba he saw a thing which filled him with terror. At night each bade the other farewell, saying, 'In the morning I shall be dead.' But they were strong and they did not die. Only their minds became empty.

"Then they came at last to the banks of a great lake.

\* There is no god but God.

This lake was so great that when they had been sold to a white boatman and when they had come out in the boat so far that they could no longer see the bank behind them, then they could yet see no bank before, and the water was all about them to the sky like the sand in the desert of Djouf. To my father's brother Djeba has recounted that they were more than the length of a moon in that going, but it must be recalled that his mind was empty, since no lake to be compared with that is in our knowledge. A wind arose on that lake and water came into the boat. They were athirst, but when they drank of that water it was sour and their thirst consumed them tenfold after. What man is there master of words sufficiently bitter to recount that going upon the lake of those men who were captive?

"Then they came at last to the other bank of that lake, and they were taken up swiftly into the bush of the country beyond, for there were war-boats of other white men on the water. And on another day they came to a great *ksar* of a hundred shelters, and in the market-place of that *ksar* they were exposed for sale. They were nine. Nine men left out of sevenscore strong men! What battle in the memory of the tribes so disastrous as that going! What ambush so bloody as that march of the companions of the Brothers of the Milk!"

For a moment after the outcry the orator's lips closed over the firelit sheen of his white teeth. I suppose that he (like his paternal uncle) had recited this tropic saga a hundred times in the villages of the black south. I doubt not that at this point he had been accustomed to pause, to receive for a moment the sweet applause of a groan.

"And so," he resumed, "they were sold that day into labor. And of the Brothers of the Milk, those whose eyes saw a single thing and whose lips spoke the same, Moa was taken one way and Djeba another, and their hearts died. Djeba, the blood-child of chieftains, was driven like a bullock up into the bush by a white driver, and when his weakness grew on him and he stumbled that driver struck him with a thong.

"That country beyond the great lake is a fat country, full of plantings of maize and cotton in the uplands where

the bush is cleared. It is known by the name of Djoja, and in extent it lies from the banks of the lake into the interior many marches away. Djeba was taken to a certain planting and thrown into a *dar* in a stockade as great as a small *ksar*. There he had the company of other captives from the River, from the Camaroun, and from the River Greater than the River in the south. Some there were who had been there so great a time that they had forgotten their own tongues and knew only the Djoja speech, and some had been born in that stockade.

"Then they were driven into the fields to labor. In his weakness the sun beat upon the head of Djeba and made him forget. Then he was driven back to the stockade, and the rain came through the thatch of the *dar* and wet his body and fever consumed his heart. But already his heart was dead; only when he slept and saw Moa in a dream did he live.

"And that driver said to him, 'How art thou called?' And he said, 'Djeba.' And the driver laughed and cried, 'That is no name for a black boy; I christen thee Djim; and Djim thou art!' And he went away, still laughing as if he had turned a word of wit. So a hate of him came into Djeba, and Djeba would have killed him, only that he was a tall, great-bodied man, and Djeba, who had been worth five warriors in his strength, was like a child in weakness now.

"That fever burned his heart and his bowels. He was given to eat of a cous-cous made of sour maize and swine-flesh. Then his stomach turned over. He vomited. He said, 'Now at last I am to die.'

"But then a woman came into that *dar*. She laid a hand on his head and called him Djim, but the hand was cool, and the anger went from his heart. She gave him milk to drink, and his pain ceased. His sickness passed. In the darkness of that shelter that woman was like the healing benignity of the moon when it has come an hour high in the east. She spoke in tones of compassion, and he was made whole.

"'Who then is that woman?' he asked of the men, 'and how is she called?'



" 'She is Mis'us, and she lives in the *dar kebir*' (the Big House).

" 'Is she then the woman of that driver?' he asked.

"His companions laughed. 'Nay, she is the woman of Maas Djo.'

" 'Who then is Maas Djo?'

" 'Maas Djo is the Maasa, the Headman. It is his silver with which thou wert got.'

" 'Why then have I not seen this Headman?'

" 'For the reason that since thou hast come he has been gone with a war-party to fight the Yankis to the north.'

" 'He has gone then to take other captives?'

" 'Nay he has gone to save those he has got.' And then they recounted to Djeba: 'The war-parties of the Yankis who come from behind the rivers of the north choke the trails. The bush never sleeps for the sound of their drums. Their torches are amongst the settlements. The long peace of the white men is broken; new confederations are formed; terror is loosed abroad. The lust of booty and of blood is aflame in the Yankis. It is said that they devour babes; it is known that when they make prayer in their holy places their ablutions are performed in the blood of a lamb. Such are they!'

"Then they recounted to Djeba how Maas Djo and the other Headmen, the holders of plantings, all the young men, how they had gathered to the war-drums in the trails, how they had chosen chiefs and gone away into the bush, and how the sky above them was that day the color of gore.

"And Djeba asked them, 'Which is then the stronger?' And they answered, 'The party of Maas Djo is the stronger. Mayhap even now it has driven the Yankis back across their rivers. Mayhap to-morrow he will return home!'

"But one amongst them who had been born into labor in that stockade in Djoja and who was now an old man said, 'Mayhap not.' That same man, who was called by the name of Moz, came into the *dar* at night and said in a low voice to Djeba, 'The Yankis are like the leaves of the pepper-tree; they are small, but their number is beyond count. Hark thou well when the bush is sleeping and thou wilt hear their powder-guns in the north.'

"Then Djeba harkened, but he heard no guns. Nevertheless he sharpened his reaping-tool. But he was not yet strong from his sickness.

"From time to time that woman from the *dar kebir* came to bring him sweet milk and speak in tones of compassion. And it was written that the heart of Djeba, the son of chieftains, should grow soft and meek. But when that driver perceived Mis'us ministering to the captive's weakness he jeered with mocking laughter, and the woman cowered before it as though she had been afraid and fled away to the Big House. And Djeba's hatred of that man grew like a pain.

" 'When I am stronger I will kill him,' he said.

"So he grew stronger.

"On another night that man called Moz came in secret and said to Djeba, 'Hark thou well in the night, and before another moon has gone thou wilt hear the drums of the tribesmen of the north.' And when he saw Djeba take up his reaping-tool he said, 'Rather shouldst thou sing for joy. For these men here who are ignorant *niggahs* have told thee things apart from the truth. Thou hast spoken to me of thy milk-brother who is called Moa, who was sold into the planting of Maas Djoj Blaak. It has come to my knowledge that Moa has fled from that planting, and with others from other plantings has gone to fight in the war-parties of the Yankis, where they are received with honors. Is it probable that such men eat babes? No, Djim, I repeat to thee, these here are child-headed *niggahs*, who know not that the Yankis come to set them free out of labor in the plantings. No, Djim, rather shouldst thou sing for joy, for when thou see'st the Yankis thou wilt see thy milk-brother in their train.'

"Then Djeba's heart sang for joy.

" 'Again, again I shall see my brother!' he cried. 'Again our eyes shall behold one thing and our breaths shall be one!' And he said to Moz, 'Now I too will run away from the stockade and I will go to meet Moa.'

"And Moz said, 'But the driver will prevent thee.'

"And Djeba said, 'No, for I will kill the driver before I go.'

"And Djeba waited, feeding his heart on the thought of Moa and on the promise of the death of that white man who had laughed.

"There came an evening when he watched and saw the driver going out of the stockade into the edge of the bush. So Djeba took up his sharp reaping-tool and followed, creeping near the ground. He came near to the driver. He saw him very clearly. The driver was dressed in finery, with a hat like a deep drum fashioned of fur, and a tunic of blue cloth with buttons of silver. Djeba saw him against the light of dusk in the sky. But the driver was not alone. Mis'us was there, where she had stolen for solitude. It was she that the driver had followed, as the desert hyena slinks slavering after the lone gazelle. The fear was in Djeba that if he struck the man, then the woman would give the alarm and he would be taken again. He might have struck both. But his heart was softened by the compassion of the woman, and what was written in the book of the future he was not given yet to read. Had he known! Had he but known to strike—the driver afterward, perhaps—but the woman first.

"But while he hesitated, already it was too late. He saw the driver step forward and grasp the woman's arm, uttering words he could not understand. He saw the woman, standing quietly, turn her head and spit once and spit twice in the driver's face.

"She continued to stand quietly, like stone. But the driver flung off toward the stockade, laughing terribly in his deep chest.

"Then Djeba would have returned and waited another chance at the man. But the thought of Moa was strong on him, and the bush was at his back. So he said to himself, 'I will return with Moa,' and he crept away.

"All that night he walked swiftly. He hid himself and slept in the day and advanced by night again. He did not know where he went, but the image and affection of his milk-brother were so powerful in Djeba that it seemed he would come truly to Moa. Because of that he remained strong. His stomach was empty but his heart was fed, and he penetrated the bush with the swiftness of a panther.



He would have wished to speak with others and know his way, but if he saw slaves in the fields then he saw with them a white driver, and he was afraid.

"There came a time when he saw a Senegal man working at the edge of a maize-planting, and no driver was in sight. So he showed himself, and he asked, 'Where then are the Yankis?' And the man answered him, 'Go thou to Tlaanta. I know nothing, but at Tlaanta all things are known.'

"'Where then is Tlaanta?' Djeba demanded. And the man said, 'If thou knowest not Tlaanta then indeed thou art an ignorant *niggah*. Turn thy face to the north, and at nightfall thou wilt behold a great *ksar* which is Tlaanta, which is the chief place of Djoja, where all things are known—"

("Tlaanta." Something queer was happening down in the subconscious regions of my brain. "Tlaanta, the chief place of Djoja." The reader may laugh, but so firmly was my attention fixed in the picture of some fabulous tropical mid-African scene that the familiar syllables, blurred in the Arab utterance, touched still too lightly to make a breach. "Tlaanta Djoja—" I glanced uneasily at Borak, as though he could help. He returned my stare with a supercilious grin, as much as to say, "My word! you're not letting yourself be taken in by this fantastic claptrap!" "*Tlaanta*, the chief place of *Djoja*" — "*Maas Djo*" — "*Yankis*" — "*Moz*" — "*Djim*" — The equatorial forest-walls were trying their hardest to topple over in my dull brain. But there was no time. I had to get back to the saga unfolding in the strong voice of the orator in that ember-lit Sahara night.)

"—And when the night fell Djeba saw before him in the sky a pillar of light. And he came on a hill and saw a great settlement in flames. And then all about him came people fleeing in confusion through the dark bush, carrying on their heads their mills and cooking-pots and crying, 'The Yankis! The Yankis are come!'

"Then Djeba was glad. He went down toward burning Tlaanta. The flame was in his face and his heart was hot, and he stood and called aloud the name of his brother of the milk. But he saw no man. A lad ran out of a shelter

that took fire. Djeba caught that lad by the arm and cried, 'Where are the Yankis?' And the lad screamed, 'Gone! Gone!' and he fell down with his eyes wide open, and Djeba saw that he was dead.

"And Djeba said to himself, 'If the Yankis are gone and Moa with them, then it will be his thought to lead them to that planting where I was a slave, to kill that driver and set me free.' So he turned his back on the burning *ksar*. He ran all through that night. Others ran with him; other slaves freed by the war-party's passage. They turned this way and that in the darkness, chanting the war-chants of the Yankis, and their paths through the bush were ruin. In the night they pillaged and burned stockades, in the morning they marched in bands, in the afternoon they slept along the trails. But by day and by night their minds were turned with freedom, and when Djeba ran amongst them demanding word of Moa their answers were without sense.

"There was a night when Djeba came upon a clearing. He saw a stockade in flames. The light of those flames showed him the fields, and then he recognized that planting and his spirit leaped with joy. He said, 'Now Moa has come here seeking me, and his revenge is before my eyes!'

"And Djeba ran bounding across the fields and came into the flame of the stockade, and he called Moa's name. He shouted the war-call of their tribe. He shouted the hunting-call that had been fixed between the milk-brothers in the old days in the bush.

"Then it seemed to Djeba that he heard the answer to the hunting-call, but in the crackling of the flames he could not say whence it came. Then he bounded on in the stockade. In that circle of fire he saw a man standing. It was a white man he had never seen. His breast was black with blood, his head hung down, and he wept. Djeba went toward him boldly.

" 'Tell me, then, where is Moa?'

"The man looked at him with dull, heavy eyes from which the tears ran down, and for answer he said, 'Where is my wife, boy? Where are my servants? I am Maas Djo. I have come home.'

"Then Djeba perceived that the man was possessed, so he did not harm him, but ran on. He leaped like a panther through all the stockade. He bounded through the wall and stood in the lighted field, and there was nothing there but his shadow. Then he ran toward the bush, and there he saw a figure. He pursued, and the figure ran into the bush, but Djeba was too swift, and overtook it, and he saw it was that woman, who crouched like a terrified gazelle and watched his coming with large eyes.

"And he said, 'It is I.'

"When the woman heard that she trembled with relief and took hold of his arm and whispered, 'It is thou, Djim! I thought it was *he*. I thought thou wert that drunken monster pursuing me still!'

"When he heard that, there came into Djeba's mind the memory and the hate of that driver. And he said, 'Where is he now?' And the woman, grasping his arm more tightly at that instant, whispered, 'Hush, thou, and hark! He comes!'

"Then near them Djeba heard the fall of feet and he saw the man advancing through the bush. He saw his shape plain and black against the glow beyond the leaves; the shape of that fur hat he remembered, in the form of a deep drum, tilted wildly; the shoulders thrust out with that tunic of silver buttons, the elbows swaggering. And he saw that the figure was drunk and lustful and that he came in cunning silence amongst the leaves, and he knew that the time of his revenge was at hand.

"So Djeba sprang through the leaves and caught the man's neck in his fingers. They fell down in the dark on the ground, and there they fought. But Djeba's powerful hands were about the man's throat, and the man lay quiet and breathed no more. Then Djeba went back, but the terrified woman was gone.

"Then Djeba returned across the field toward the stockade, calling Moa's name again, and in the field near the stockade he saw lying the body of a man. The man was despoiled of his clothes and naked, and his head cut three-quarters from his trunk. And Djeba looked and saw that it was that driver.



"Then Djeba said to himself, 'The night is full of infernal creatures, witches and *djinoun*. I have slain the driver in his finery in the bush, and here he lies an hour dead and naked in the field. The night is red with devil-work.' A fear came on him and his teeth knocked together. Nevertheless he went back to the bush, laid hold of that other man's feet, and pulled him through the bush to the field, and there he looked at the face of the man he had slain.

*"He looked at the face of the man he had slain!"*

The syllables of the loud repetition went away across the sleeping floor of the square and played among the invisible arcades, echoes deep-toned, momentous, tragic. And in the glow of the embers I saw the lip of that oblivious clay pulsing, pulsing, with the same laggard and monotonous beat. I continued to stare at it. You may be certain now that I stared. The short hairs at the back of my skull stood up and pricked the skin. For the wonder of it. Even to that Senegal orator himself the saga he repeated remained fabulous, an epic of equatorial rivers. Chanted first by son and then by grandson at a hundred feasts and under a hundred village council-trees and grown into the body of mid-African legendry, not till this night had it come to ears that heard; to eyes that saw with the eyes of that ancient, moribund, blind, black wanderer. For now I knew that I had heard the tale of that incendiary night on a "Djoja planting" before, not once, but many, many times; not in the glow of a Sahara camp-fire, but in the ember light of a Hancock County chimney-nook, where my own grandmother Peyton used to sit before bedtime thirty years ago, reciting a saga of her own.

The narrator's voice was heard again, rushing, staccato.

"Then Djeba ran through the bush to find that woman, his one thought that he might now slay her too. For he perceived now that she must be a witch-doctress, thus by compassion to have blinded his eyes. He ran with all his power. How long he ran, what man can say? Sometimes he seemed to see that woman as a shadow in the bush before him and sometimes as a bird flying before him through the trees. In him there was no hunger save the hunger

for her killing, no thirst save the thirst for her blood, no weariness save the weariness of the damned soul.

"And then there was a time when it seemed to Djeba that he was in the midst of many men. He saw that they were white men and that they moved in a thousand ranks. Ruin lay behind them and thunder ran around. And he remembered the words of Moz: 'The Yankis are like the leaves of the pepper-tree; they are small, but their number is beyond count.' And when the nights came Djeba saw their camp-fires, and even their fires were beyond count.

"A forgetfulness came on Djeba. He ran from fire to fire, crying, 'Where is Moa?' And those men mocked him, saying, 'Moa what?' But Djeba screamed at them and ran on. Or sometimes they named him *Samboh*, saying, 'Hold, *Samboh*. Sit down with us now and sing!' Then Djeba thanked them, and sat down with them and sang, and the war-chant of the Yankis filled the sky.

"And after many days Djeba came with the war-party to the banks of that lake, and there he beheld a bearded chieftain sitting on a horse, and he fell down on his face and wept. And he implored, 'That I come again to my own country beyond this water, where Moa, my brother, has returned, and where he awaits me in the village of my tribe!' And that chieftain heard.

"In after-days then was Djeba placed in a boat, together with many of the River and the Cameroun, and he returned across that lake where the waters lay to the sky like the sands in the desert of Djouf. Then they made a village on the shore. But Djeba left them. He penetrated the bush through which he had marched many years before, bound to that chain. He penetrated the country of enemies and he passed through. Then Djeba came to his own village again. There were old men there who knew him when he spoke his name. They rejoiced and made a feast. All night they feasted. And one of the old men said to Djeba, 'Moa, thy brother of the milk was taken with thee. Where then is Moa?'

"And Djeba said, 'I do not know.' And he took none of the feast.

"And in the years afterward, when Djeba had taken

wives and got sons, there came into our country the missionaries of God (to whom be the prayer) and of his Prophet (may his bliss never decrease)——

*"La illah il allah!"*

"And they spoke the word of the Koran to Djeba, and Djeba's heart turned in his breast. And he said then, 'My heart can no longer contain a lie. Hark all to the truth. Moa, my brother of the milk—which bond is sacred—Moa, my brother, him I slew with my own hands in that land which is beyond the great water. I slew him, being tricked by a witch-woman. And that witch-woman I was not able to slay! That then is my sin!'

"That then is the sin of Djeba. I have spoken, I, Belkano, who am the son of his son!"

In the hush that followed that deep-toned verbal signature my breath whistled small in my throat.

"Lord! Lord! Oh, my Lord!"

Borak eyed me with a smirk and a grunt. The black fellow showed his shining teeth again. He took another breath into his lungs.

"For the length of thirty Ramadans the father of my father has not opened his mouth to any man in speech. Because of that sin, because he would not look at any man, his eyes have become blind. He would not hear, and his ears are deaf. Thus men know that he is holy. So they come for many marches to touch his hand. Sometimes then his lips are opened, and for their ears he will sing again that war-chant of the Yankis. And then those men will give him offerings against his pilgrimage, that he may see Holy Mekka and ease him of that sin and die——"

The voice was rising.

"They give him offerings of broad copper! They throw down pieces of silver before him! *They throw down gold!*"

I heard the wind going out of Borak's chest at that; an obscure thoracic collapse. A snort.

"At last! At last the plot unfolds. Now the old bird will render that popular ditty entitled, 'The Unwritten War-song of the Wild Yankis of Yankisland,' and the com-



pany will contribute. And strangely enough the ringmaster's eye is fastened unerringly on *you*."

"For God's sake, man——"

"Yes, but you'll see," he persisted. "You'll note that his toe even now is prodding the old one in the ribs."

It was true. I saw the nudging and peremptory toe. I stared at that lip hanging in the ember-light. I beheld a disorder and quickening of that fleshy pulse. I heard an obedient sound issuing forth. It was a very small, shallow, creaking sound. It emerged from that emotionless mask of senility; it rose and fell in mechanical lengths of tone like a bent wire and went away and was lost in the night of the packed Sahara square. It was a queer chant.

"Cock and bull!" grunted Borak.

"For God's sake, man, hush!"

I stared and I listened. Yes, it was a very queer chant indeed. The short hairs were beginning to stand up again at the back of my skull.

On the ground, red with the firelight, a copper sou was tossed. I saw another fall, and another. I took out my wallet and found a hundred-franc note, and I let it flutter into the circle over the shoulder of Bou Dik.

Borak got hold of me.

"*Lord!* I say, now! What's *that* for?"

"To help and ease him of that 'sin.'"

"But my dear simple chap—all that rigmarole——"

"Of the greatest of all African wars——"

He tilted his head at me with the absurdest suspicion about my wits.

"Come away!" he said.

I got up and went with him out into the black ruck of the camels. He was groaning audibly over that squandered bank-note. "Man, man, and you were really taken in by that beggar's claptrap. Why—look you—in that old chap's day there weren't enough white men in Central Africa all put together——"

"Borak!" I said. "*Will* you listen to that song!"

In the hollow of the market, above the grunt and snore of the caravan, the thin war-chant of the "Yankis" wound on, repeating, repeating,

John B'own's body lahs amoldin' in the g'ave,  
 John B'own's body lahs amoldin' in the g'ave,  
 John B'own's body lahs amoldin' in the g'ave,  
 But his soul goes mahchin' on——

In that Sahara darkness where the pale courses come  
 from beyond the South I saw Atlanta burning. Sherman  
 was on the march.